



NEWS RELEASE

GOVERNOR'S COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
SEPTEMBER 18, 2006

CONTACT: LYDIA LENKER
615.741.3763 (OFFICE)
615.289.9375 (CELL)

BREDESEN OUTLINES DIABETES-PREVENTION STRATEGY *GOVERNOR MEETS WITH NATIONAL HEALTH LEADERS TO SEEK INPUT, ADVICE*

Memphis – Governor Phil Bredesen today introduced an aggressive new plan to encourage Tennessee pre-teens and teenagers to adopt healthier lifestyles and attack the rising diabetes epidemic linked to poor eating and exercise habits.

Speaking to national health leaders at a Memphis forum organized by the Council of State Governments and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Bredesen outlined a series of new investments in public schools across Tennessee designed to counteract what he called a “perfect storm” – the ever-increasing prevalence of fast food combined with TV and video games and diminishing attention to physical activity.

Bredesen said a rising incidence of childhood obesity, which leads to Type-2 diabetes (also known as “adult onset” diabetes), is threatening the health of kids in urban, suburban and rural areas across Tennessee.

“Like many American kids, Tennessee’s children are at risk,” the Governor said. “If a child today is diagnosed as a pre-teen with Type-2 diabetes, they’ll have vision problems in their twenties, heart disease in their thirties and kidney dialysis in their forties. The good news is we absolutely know how to prevent this. We just need to put our heads down and do it.”

He added: “Our kids deserve nothing less.”

Tennessee’s diabetes prevention strategy has two main components: an innovative new initiative known as “Project Diabetes” and significant new investments in Tennessee’s existing Coordinated School Health program:

Project Diabetes

- \$6 million in grants approved by the General Assembly to help communities across Tennessee combat diabetes in ways that work best locally, including launching new community and public awareness initiatives or expanding existing nonprofit efforts that already are working well.
- \$1 million for the National Institutes of Health to launch a pilot project with 10 Tennessee high schools designed to persuade teens to change behaviors when it comes to food and exercise. Among other things, the multi-faceted approach will use youth-oriented technology, such as email and cell phone text messaging, to communicate with young people in and out of school.

-MORE-

Coordinated School Health

- \$15 million approved by the General Assembly to expand Tennessee's longstanding but historically limited Coordinated School Health initiative. The comprehensive program – which includes everything from expanded classroom education to more P.E. to nutrition programs to counseling – now is in only 10 school systems statewide but will be expanded to virtually every school system in the state.
- According to Bredesen: "Some school systems may want to take the additional resources to do new work with body-mass indexes and how to effectively use them. Others may find ways to turn their cafeterias into real-world classrooms – maybe demonstrate that macaroni and cheese, however comforting, is not the state vegetable."

In addition to outlining Tennessee's new diabetes-prevention strategy, Bredesen reached out to officials from other states and nonprofit groups attending the Memphis forum to suggest national or regional partnerships in an effort to leverage best practices, latest research and available resources. "The more we can lock arms with like-minded states and organizations, the better off our kids will be in the future," the Governor said.

Bredesen said the State of Tennessee and Project Diabetes has had preliminary discussions with the nonprofit Alliance for a Healthier Generation to collaborate moving forward. The nonprofit New York-based initiative's current partners include the American Heart Association, former President Bill Clinton and Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee.

Bredesen said the ultimate goal of Tennessee's new diabetes prevention strategy is to short-circuit a looming public health crisis before it occurs rather than just standing by and paying for treatment after it happens.

"Prevention is one of the great frontiers in health care," Bredesen added. "It's time for us to move beyond just funding the treatment of disease. It's time for us to find ways to prevent it. I want Tennessee to be a pioneer and a national leader, starting with diabetes prevention."

###